DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 724 UD 019 653

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TITLE Community Participation in Urban Public Schools; An Overview of Issues.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 21p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Board of Education Policy; Community Action; *Community Influence; *Community Involvement; *Community Role; Community Schools; Disadvantaged Groups; *Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Parent Participation; Public Schools; *School Community Relationship; Urban Areas
IDENTIFIERS Teacher Corps

ABSTRACT

The issues addressed in this paper include: (1) various views of what constitutes a community; (2) the controversy over the quantity, kind, and division of decisionmaking powers allotted to community action groups; (3) arguments against and in favor of community participation; (4) characteristics which prohibit citizen participation among disadvantaged groups; (5) the benefits of community participation; and (6) administrative roadblocks to community participation. Specific programs such as community schools and the Teacher Corps which encourage parent and community involvement in educational planning are also examined. (EB)

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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: AN OVERVIEW OF ISSUES

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1979

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Introduction

The term community is ambiguous, complex, and has multi-meanings. One way of defining community--A number of people having common ties, living in a common place, and subject to the same laws. The community is essentially viewed as demographic. Its people, its resources, and institutions that evolve from living in a common place constitutes community. This concept of community is the physical-social environment with the basic variable being demographic. Another way of defining community is to view it as a social order. This definition may include a description of the population, culture(s), style, collective action and the characteristic interaction patterns. Its frame of reference is the solidarity, cohesion and the quality of social relationships. The social-psychological factor is the basic variable (Alvarez, Batson, et al, 1976).

Some communities resist placement in either the physical-social or the social-psychological concept of community. This gives rise to a third way of defining community. That is; that community is derived from an area's ethnic, racial, or cultural composition and uses this single factor as the basis for definition. In an attempt to concentrate the delivery of services to the urban minority, the practice of catchment areas is used, where the target group is more likely to be confined to a specific location.

Prior to the 1950's, the space age and the civil rights movement, the federal government displayed a low profile in local "states rights" affairs. Since that time the federal government has encouraged and financed communities to help solve local and national problems. It is recognized that the civil rights movement played a big role in the present emphasis on community control, involvement, and participation. The most common accepted definition of community participation "... refers to the variety of processes and mechanisms by which citizens, residents, consumers seek to exert control or influence over those who are making decisions about services that affect them or that potentially may affect them." (Alvarez, Batson, et. al., 1976).

Programs associated with community action and have greater community participation are usually in communities where there is a degree of independence, social cohesiveness that is based on shared values, interests and behavior patterns. Frequently, those who participate as members of advisory boards, committees, or staff are potential users rather than users of services, and it is evident that most urban minority communities are not likely to fit this concept of community participation. On the other hand, it is unlikely that any service system is operating on the local level without community participation, nor is it likely that any service system with community participation is functioning without controversy. The potentially volatile issue is the quantity, kind and the division of decision-making power.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE URBAN MINORITY GROUP

There is as much variety and diversity among the urban minority dwellers as there is among people elsewhere. There are poor urban minority dwellers who live in peace, dignity and with neighborhood pride amid squalor. There are found occasional pockets of unusual stability, considerable neighborhood pride and leadership.

In the main, the poor urban minority is characterized by certain qualities that show up with unhealthy frequency and often prohibit citizen participation in service organizations as decision-makers (Baltimore Human Renewal Program, 1964).

The characteristics of many of disadvantaged people seem to affect any and all efforts to improve their lot. The major characteristics are:

1. Have deep-rooted educational and cultural handicaps resulting from years of deprivation; a mental block to self improvement.
2. Cannot cope with responsibilities and demands of modern urban living, often because they are migrants from equally poor, but entirely different rural surroundings.
3. Are constantly handicapped with the burden of physical or mental illness in the household.
4. Come from homes where there has been divorce, desertion, promiscuity or even a total lack of coherent family unit.
5. Have personalities extruded by pressures of poverty and despair into a sense of values for different and sometimes beyond the comprehension of middle-class and upper-class observers.

6. Feel no allegiance to a social order that relegates them to misery; hence slip easily into crime, have no respect for police-ment, and the symbol of the society that has rejected them.
7. Distrust or don't understand even the few services, such as counseling, job training, or employment help, that are available.
8. Are seriously lacking in motivation to improve their lot; an attitude engendered by years of futility, a feeling that no one cares what happens to them. In the case of blacks especially, the feeling of defeatism is rampant because of the scars of prejudice--the frequent cases where one of their number did seek and got an education, only to be denied a decent job or house because he was black.
9. Live in substandard housing that tends to aggravate many of the other problems attendant to their poverty.

The Urban Education Task Force of 1970 considered the impoverished urban student and urban factors in his environment, which in combination will impact on how the urban minority child both perceive and perform in school.

To educate an urban minority child is more expensive than elsewhere (almost twice as much is needed) and is a major factor in their education. On the otherhand, urban school systems have done comparatively little with the increasingly short supply of funds to improve the educational level of inner city or urban students. They now have parent target group representatives that federal impact funds rightfully belong to them, and now they are more perceptive as to the intent and the use of those funds.

Both black and white communities have expressed their judgment of the educational system's failure by defeating local school bond issues at the polls, by demands for decentralization, community schools and alternative school systems. The Urban Education Task Force recommended that schools should be a community determination. As such, the community residents and students who are the direct participants must acquire an active role in the decision-making of the program. Whether this role is full control or a partnership will need to be worked out within broad flexible guidelines. Regardless of the form of community involvement, certain factors must exist: 1) Priorities for spending available funds; 2) Curriculum design and implementation of program components; and 3) Employment and evaluation of key personnel (preferential hiring of community residents).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The arguments against citizen sharing in decision-making powers causes a loss of quality in the programs, based on the citizens lack of professional knowledge and the question of legitimacy of citizen groups who claim to represent the community.

Another argument is that manpower, hours and money invested in involving community participation could be better utilized in furthering the mission of the agency's program. Why the additional burden of negotiation with citizens in addition to all the other levels of private and governmental agencies which often causes delays in implementation of services.

Still another argument is the criticism of non-autonomy and decentralized services with the transfer of control to local groups only institutionalizes seperatism along racial, ethnic or social-class lines. Those who take this view cite localism as being contrary to the governmental role in assaulting inequality, since the neighborhood is likely to be conservative in its views.

ARGUMENTS FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The basic argument for community participation is the beneficial experience it has on the participant and the community. The process is legitimized by democratic values that uphold the rights of people to participate in making decisions in matters that directly or potentially affect them.

Another argument is that participation is therapeutic and alters the feeling of powerlessness that develops in ghetto and poor communities resulting from experiences with unresponsive systems. Participation builds a competency-based capacity to cope and affect outcomes. What is brought into play is a perspective of relevancy and positive program outcomes free from influences of careerism, institutional needs, and political interests. Community participants bring special knowledge regarding discrepancies, deficiencies and inadequacies. They are able to help identify major problems and help set priorities.

RATIONALE FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The efforts of community participation is to bring people together to develop awareness of the feelings of their community and to work at problems and interests that they have in common, regardless of community definitions, ethnic or geographic boundaries.

Communities contain many levels and many interest groups. Therefore, community participants are not the total community and may not speak for the entire community. Other segments must be brought into coalitions.

The process of community participation is to exert efforts in the redistribution or realignment of community powers, so as not to exclude catagories of citizens from gaining a greater share or an inequitable share. The process also focuses on improving the quality of the agency's services. Inherent in this process is the possibility of the community being manipulated to achieve goals, which in itself may be constructive or destructive.

Participation is an attempt to upgrade recruiting and the holding patterns of power of the agency's programs. Through active participation, individuals are better guided to direct their own lives through reciprocity of relationships and emerge with increased self-actualization. Having client groups participate in identifying problems, issues and service goals, agency programs gain increased legitimacy and insures effectiveness.

The Urban School Task Force (1970) stated a rationale for an expanded community role which supports the principle that parents and youth of the neighborhood communities contribute to the

formulation of programs, since they will be experiencing its effects in various ways over extended periods of time. The task force also supported the principle that no significant or effective changes in urban education can be achieved without the involvement and support of parents and local community residents who has heretofore been excluded from the decision-making process concerning the goals and priorities of schools. The task force also supported the principle that no significant or effective changes in urban education can be achieved without the involvement and support of parents and local community residents who has heretofore been excluded from the decision-making process concerning the goals and priorities of schools. The task force recommendations were:

1. Require a mechanism for community determination that provides for substansive community impact on policy development and implementation.
2. Make provisions for the training of school administrators and school board members in accommodating themselves to the above mechanism.
3. Provide funds to a planning group for staff which must create the mechanism for community determination.
4. Provide for evaluation by the federal government to obtain information to analyze the process of change in the educational system in order to insure that there is substansive decision-making in the community.
5. Provide for evaluation at the local level to insure that the mechanism achieves its objectives in making the system more accountable to its clients.

Like most bureaucratic organizations, schools are having a difficult time coping with the rate and complexity of change in our society. If schools are to remain a viable institution, plans must be made to involve the community in the total schooling process. One of the schools most valuable resource is the use of school volunteers in the regular instructional program and extended day programs. The basic approach for school change lies in the assumptions that:

1. For change to be substansive the community must be directly involved in the decision-making process, programming, implementation and evaluation.
2. Schools belong to the community and should provide opportunities and programs for the involvement of persons of all ages in that community or the extended community.
3. Talented community people are available in all communities to assist with instructional and service programs. The school must take leadership in recruiting, training, managing & assessing the effectiveness of those persons used.

If schools are to become truly accountable, they must begin to act with parents as partners in the learning process. Getting community members to support school activities is one step closer to solidifying the link between school and home. This linkage dispells rumors, creates a feeling of ownership, increases cooperation, increases the chances of passing school bond issues, and bridges the gap between instructional programs and extended day programs.

ADMINISTRATIVE ROADBLOCKS TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Over three decades ago the community was recognized as the teacher's most important resource for pupil guidance (Stang, 1946). The community is comprised of potent factors of organized agencies, services and experiences that influence children's development. It is the teacher's responsibility to identify specific community factors that constructively influence his students for their inclusion in the educative process. Social workers have long recognized the need for group and individual socialization while they try to deal with the victims poor environments. The rationale for the need for this social interchange is that the individual is unable to cope with complex organizations.

This practice is supported by Sjoberg, Bryner, and Farris (1966) in their concept of the bureaucracy and the lower class. They asserted that bureaucracies serving the lower class tend to reinforce the culture of poverty. First, the service organizations cannot and do not meet the needs of the clients they are suppose to serve. Second, lower class clients are inadequately prepared to cope with service organizations because:

1. They lack knowledge about the "rules of the game," and how to manipulate and control the mechanisms of bureaucracies to their best advantage.
2. Their contacts with organizations are confined to the lower echelons and staff members at the lower echelons who are constrained by rules and regulations.
3. They are less able to deal with people on an impersonal basis. Particularly, the urban minority person.

Sjoberg, Bryner, and Ferris (1976) further assert that service organizations are inefficient and ineffective for urban minority clients due to:

1. Staffing arrangements result in reduced quality of service. For example, the high proportion of first year teachers.
2. Personnel prefer to work with clients who make it easier to achieve measurable goals (for example, middle-class clients). Clients are more often blamed for poor service than the organization (for example, IQ tests stress middle-class values are used to characterize urban minority students as less intelligent; the students held responsible rather than the organization).
4. The emphasis given to rules and standards often result in inadequate attention to the multiple and varied needs of urban minority clients.
5. Staff members are inadequately socialized into the reality world view and particular circumstances of urban minority clients.
6. Emphasis on stability and the control of clients by system employees often stifles grievances of urban minority clients.

The Urban Education Task Force (1970) cited that federal school programs are not conceived and executed by teachers, principals, nor even researchers. New programs are conceived by Congress, and administered by bureaucrats who are far removed from schools and the school districts they were elected to serve.

This was not emphasized as an issue at the House of Representatives Oversight Hearings that same year, in 1976. What was stressed was the shortage of time (usually two weeks) given by the federal government to implement programs. The rebuttal given was:

"If General Motors' plants were given 2 weeks to plan for their new models, they would not get the job done." It was the general feeling that the bureaucratic red-tape at all levels has to be reduced or minimized. Other needs were outlined such as: More time for planning and monies for long-range planning; advisory committees need to be given some policy-making power, administrators have trouble just sharing power; parents need training, administrators and other staff also need training; a need for someone with community sanction and power to oversee the local school programs; no less than 50% of an advisory committee should be parents; specific guidelines for advisory committees for local schools and parents on advisory committees should receive some kind of compensation.

There are four ways organizations acquires its participants:

1. Selects members (formally or informally), and they participate on a voluntary basis (example, private universities).
2. Does not select its members and participation is not mandatory (example, state universities).
3. Selects its members and is mandatory to participate (example, citizen army).
4. Neither organization nor its participants have a choice. By law or tradition, clients of these organizations are required to participate and organizations have little choice about the clients they will serve (example, public schools). Such organizations are guaranteed survival, seldom compete for members and are not usually tied to quality performance due to the intangible complexities of teaching learning and assessment.

Organizations must maintain a delicate relationship with the local community. If they are too autonomous they run the risk of losing touch with their constituencies which pays the cost of delivery of services or products. For example, schools need some autonomy from parents in order to maintain standards of objectivity in determining curriculum, instructional procedures, evaluating and grading students.

This balance of a delicate relationship with the community is maintained by visiting teachers, neighborhood and school centers, PTA and volunteer workers. Litwak and Meyer (1974) found that where citizens were already closely involved with the school (mostly middle-class) tended to increase social distance. On the otherhand, where there was social distance (mostly urban minority schools), the schools show more initiative to reduce social distance. It is, therefore, realistic to assume that an organization such as the school will seek more contact with the community only if it does not have to give up control. Generally, when organizations reach out to citizens they are not necessarily extending opportunities to citizens but many only be extending their own control and influence.

Realizing this fact of shared responsibility and unshared decision-making, led to disenchantment with public schools and led the founding of independent free schools in the mid-1960's. Many (over fifty) have survived urban renewal and inflation. Independent free schools are usually started by "rebels" who chose not to cope with the school organization by rejecting both goals and procedures, and substituted a new set of goals and

procedures in alternative education programs. They are attempted to operationalize what the radical reformers of the 1960's verbalized.

Independent Black Free Schools predicted that the black communities will be engaged in continual struggles to control and for reconstruction of schools to meet the needs of its black constituancies. They identified the present public school system as being at various stages of despair, huge, bureaucratic bungling and recalcitrant with respect to change. The Independent Black Free Schools perceived its mission as having limitless possibilities in creating and maintaining viable educational opportunities to develop: "Students who are politically conscious, socially responsible, independently creative and unshamedly self-critical." (Kaurouma, 1976).

The Independent Black Free Schools all emphasized the improvement of self concept in their curriculum, & African history along with the basic skills. Community participation in the independent free school was no more than in the public schools nor was there any evidence that more participation is encouraged. However, Kaurouma (1976) reported that Independent Black Free schools were conceptualized as an instrument of freedom and improvement within the community. Parental participation and involvement in the governance of the schools was mandatory.

Both black and white communities have expressed their judgment of the system's failure by defeating local bond issues, demand for alternative schools, decentralization, and community controlled schools. One variation of an attempt at community

participation is the community school concept. Community schools offer services and sponsor leadership in response to joint planning by the local school board and the community. All members of the community have an opportunity to learn at the school center. It may offer health and legal services, counseling and employment. Community schools have been successful in one respect: by making the community feel that it is the locus of control and that the school really belong to the community.

The involvement of parents and community planning is often a forgotten concept in educational planning. The trend in federal legislation is to make parent and community involvement a mandatory component for funding. A typical example of parent and community involvement as funding criteria is the Teacher Corps. They typically include a staff person called a Community Coordinator (a bona fide member of the community he/she represents), whose responsibility it is to relate community education training and service activities of the interns and teachers. The following conclusions are apparent from field testing this model:

1. Community involvement in teacher education contributes to improve school-community relations.
2. Community awareness and environmental training is vital to the development of effective teachers.
3. Involvement and training for community adults enhances school-community relations.
4. Future teachers not trained with a "sense of community" will probably be ineffective or less effective than today's teachers.

5. Community resources, both human and material, contributes to the schooling process.

6. Involvement of community in teacher education programs contributes to the mutual understanding of the school, its objectives, the community and its children.

7. There is a need to develop effective parity relationships in educational programming at all levels.

8. Teachers, parents, children and the community-at-large benefit when communications about school and schooling are improved.

9. Multicultural teacher education is enhanced through the inclusion of a community based component.

The definition of community and neighborhood are varied and often elusive. The same can be said for the concepts of community participation, community involvement, and community control.

Seldom can community and school authorities agree on the degree of decision-making power that constitutes community participation, involvement, or control. Critical issues in education (as in other matters) is always more tenuous, of overwhelming urgency and magnitude in urban inner city areas. It is apparent that without better working relationships and greater solidarity of community and school, public education will remain the step-child in national priorities.

Recognizing the need for co-joint efforts, federal legislation mandate community participation on the decision-making level. Even this is a quasi process in that the school is the giver of services to a recipient community, and does little to elevate community self-concept and self actualization. This is more

the case than the exception in communities where the overwhelming majority of the decision-making power is vested in school administrators and staff personnel. The process of eroding the wall of racism, elitism and professionalism is a difficult one, but there is hope that more school districts will be attracted to community participation models explicated by Teacher Corps, and similar programs.

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